

# Notes on a Historical Germanic Grammar I: Nonarguments for the Organic Development of the Old Icelandic *i*-stem Genitive Singular Ending *-ar*

Seiichi Suzuki

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## 1. Introduction

The primary concern of this short article is only destructive: it calls into question one of the widely held views on the origin of the Old Icelandic *i*-stem gen. sg. ending, *-ar*. More specifically, we shall raise objections to the interpretation which takes *-ar* to be a reflex of IE *\*-ois*, thereby disconfirming the theory at issue.

## 2. Refutation

### 2.1. Outline of the Theory Criticized

The theory which will be placed under scrutiny is entertained by among others, Gutenbrunner (1951: § 83), Heusler (1967: §§217a, 219. 1), Krahe-Meid (1969: 31) and Ranke-Hofmann (1979: § 23). Considering that these works are standard handbooks<sup>1</sup>, it may be no exaggeration to say that their view has come closest to being the established one.

According to the interpretation at issue, one of the *i*-stem gen. sg. endings, *-ar*<sup>2</sup>, derives from IE *\*-ois* (the *o*-grade of the stem-formative *\*-i-* plus the genitive sign *\*-es*) via PG *\*-aiz* > PN *\*-ār*. The proto-form, apart from the purported Olce. *-ār*, gives rise to the following reflexes:<sup>3</sup>

- (1) OInd. *matēš* 'snake'      Av. *ažōiš* 'snake'  
       Lith. *naktēš* 'cattle'      OChS *nošti* 'cattle'  
       Goth. *anstais* 'favour'

Of particular importance here are Goth. *-ais* and Lith. *-ēš*, the significance of which will become clearer immediately below. It is sufficient to bear in mind at this point that the Goth. reflex is not subject to monophthongization, and that the Lith. counterpart bears a circumflex accent '˘'.

## 2.2. An Implicit Claim

In this subsection we shall extract one of the possible empirical claims the theory under consideration implicitly but inevitably entails.

Given the regularity of sound change as a fundamental assumption, the sequence IE *\*-ois* of whatever morphological, syntactic or semantic categories should manifest itself as *-ar* in OIce, which is exactly what happens in the *i*-stem gen. sg. ending from IE *\*-ois*. In other words, the theory could not remain tenable if something other than *-ar* turned out to be a genuine reflex of *\*-ois*. Therefore, in an attempt at putting this claim to the empirical test, we shall consider what IE *\*-ois*'s gave rise to historically.

A word or two is in order concerning the heuristic way of postulating the original circumflex accent (as opposed to the acute counterpart) for what otherwise would count as a phonological equivalent of *\*-ois*. By way of justification, we must appeal to (a) its Gr. and Lith. cognates in terms of accentual pattern and to (b) its Gmc reflexes in terms of the diphthongal vs. monophthongal values.

The case of Lith. is quite straightforward: the presence of '˘' points to there having been a circumflex accent originally. Recall in this regard the Lith. form *-ēš* given earlier. The situation of

Goth. is no less simple than this. The circumflex accent contributed to the retention of the original diphthongal status of the vowels on which it had been placed. See *-ais* above. Gr., on the other hand, provides a rather complicated (yet no less clear) picture, which will be discussed below in detail.

### 2.3. Verification of the Claim

What comes into concern is the optative present marker *\*-oi-* plus the 2nd sg. ending *\*-s*, i. e. *\*-ois*:

- (2)    *\*bher-oi-s* 'bear'  
          *\*dregħ-oi-s* 'drink'

Whatever is generally assumed as the thematic opt. pres. marker (represented as *\*-oI-* for the time being for avoiding unnecessary confusions with regard to accent value) derived from the merger of the thematic vowel *\*-o-* and the weak-grade opt. marker *\*-ī-* (<*\*-iə*). In view of the several competing proto-forms thus far proposed<sup>4</sup>, it seems to be of great importance to examine the issue once more. In connection with our concern, moreover, it is of urgent necessity to demonstrate that *\*-oI-* bore a circumflex accent originally.

(=*\*-oi̯-*).

Let us begin by considering Old Lith., where the IE *\*-oI-* functions as a formative of 'imperative' and 'permissive' moods (cf. Endzelins 1971: § 398; Stang 1966: 422 ff.)<sup>5</sup>:

- (3)    *tedirbiē* 'may (he) work'  
          *tevediē* 'may (he) lead'  
          *tekentiē* 'suffer'

Obviously, the existence of '̃' points to the fact that IE *\*-oI-* originally carried a circumflex accent.

Let us turn to Gr. counterparts, next:

- (4) *φερῶις* 'bear'  
*λίποις* 'leave'  
*γραφῶις* 'write'

The fact that *-οι-* is unaccented in Gr. does not prevent us from being able to ascertain that *\*-oI-* bore a circumflex accent. According to the Gr. accent placement rule, an acute accent falls on the antepenultimate only if the ultimate contains a short vowel. That is, the presence of a short vowel on the ultimate constitutes a necessary condition for the acute accent placed on the antepenultimate. This, in conjunction with the 'recessive accent' rule, which determines the verbal accentual pattern in general, amounts to dictating in effect that an acute accent, whenever required, falls on the antepenultimate if the vowel on the ultimate is short.

With respect to the operation of the rule, however, diphthongs exhibit a certain peculiarity: some diphthongs follow the pattern of short vowels, and others, that of long vowels. It is generally held that the divergence noted stems from the difference of accent in proto-forms: the former group derives from an acute accent, and the latter, from a circumflex accent (cf. Meillet-Vendryes 1979: § 189 note 3). This brings us then to examine the behaviour of *-α-* in terms of accentual pattern:

- (5) *παιδεύοις* 2nd sg. opt. pres. 'educate'  
*πεπαιδευέκοι* 2nd opt. aorist  
 Cf. Sg. primary-tense medio-passive markers  
*-μαι* (1st)  
*-σαι* (2nd; Goth. *-za*)  
*-ται* (3rd; Goth. *-da*)  
 e. g.  
*πεπαίδευμαι*  
*πεπαίδευσαι*  
*πεπαίδευται*

The above examples, which could be easily multiplied, are a definite indication that the opt. pres. marker *-oi-* functions parallel to long vowels with respect to the accent placement. In light of this, it may be fairly concluded that its proto-form *\*-oI-* bore a circumflex, rather than an acute, accent in IE.

Let us direct our attention to the Gmc reflexes. As touched upon earlier, IE short diphthongs with a circumflex accent correspond to PGmc diphthongs while those with an acute accent correspond to monophthongs. This state of affairs presents itself most obviously in Goth, as the following examples testify.:

- (6) *ō*-stem dat. sg. *-ai* < IE *\*-āi*, e.g. *gibai* 'gift'  
*i*-stem gen. sg. *-ais* < IE *\*-ois*, e.g. *anstais* 'favour'  
*u*-stem gen. sg. *-aus* < IE *\*-oūs*, e.g. *sunaus* 'son'  
 Cf. 2nd sg. pres. ind. pass. *-za*  
     e.g. *bairaza* < IE *\*bher-e-sai* 'bear'  
 3rd sg. pres. ind. pass. *-da*  
     e.g. *bairada* < IE *\*bher-e-tai*  
 For Gr. counterparts, see (5).

The very pattern the opt. pres. marker shows:

- (7) *bairais* 'bear'  
*drigkais* 'drink'  
*gibais* 'give'

This clearly strengthens our reconstruction of a circumflex accent for *\*-oI-*.

To sum up, then, we have converging evidence from Lith., Gr. and Goth., which justifies us in assigning the original circumflex accent to the opt. pres. marker *\*-oI-*, represented hereafter more precisely as *\*-oi̯-*.

Now the stage is set for us to examine the OIce reflex of the

2nd sg. opt. pres. sign IE *\*-ois*. By way of illustration, consider the following:

- (8) *berer* 'bear'  
*gefer* 'give'  
*drekker* 'drink'

The result obtained turns out to be something other than what the theory under discussion predicts it to be (= *-ar*). Thus, proponents of the view fall into a dilemma whereby the originally identical phonological configuration splits into two in its subsequent development, apparently with no motivating force involved. This reasonably leads us to question the validity of the theory.

Still, a way out is open for the advocates of the theory to immunize themselves against refutation by the foregoing arguments. They could (in an ad hoc way, of course) invoke some differentiation between the gen. sign and the opt. sign so as to make the above discussion harmless. That there would be little to be gained by doing so is shown next. To this end, we turn to certain residual forms:

- (9) *vetterges* 'nothing'  
*Alfer-* 'the first element of place names'

A case in point is *-er*. Following Noreen (1913: § 193), it may stand to reason to hold this to be a residual form of the *i*-stem gen. sg. What is of greatest interest here is that this *-er* is exactly what is attested by the subjunctive ending *-er* as in *berer*. From this, it may be fair to trace back the form to IE *\*-ois* by way of  $\langle *iR \rangle \langle PN *ēr \rangle \langle PG *-aiz \rangle$ . Therefore, we are allowed to infer that insofar as nothing hindered IE *\*-ois* from being put to use, it appeared in OIce as *-er*, rather than *-ar*, in perfect accordance with the 2nd sg. opt. pres IE *\*-ois*. This argument, then, blocks a possible way out whereby the *-ar* is rendered

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phonologically compatible with IE *\*-ois*<sup>6</sup>.

### 3. Conclusion

The arguments advanced in this paper have definitely shown that the attempt to trace the OIce *i*-stem gen. sg. ending *-ar* back to IE *\*-ois* is a category mistake. Therefore, the real origin of the form in question must be sought elsewhere.

### NOTES

- 1 Other handbooks, e.g. Andersen (1966), Gordon (1957), make no reference to the issue.
- 2 As is represented by *staðar* 'place', *burar* 'son', *fundar* 'meeting', etc.
- 3 Cf. Brugmann: § 461. 2.
- 4 Cf. *\*-oi-* (Krahe-Meid 1969<sup>7</sup>)  
*\*-oi-* (Brugmann 1902, Streitberg 1974<sup>4</sup>)  
*\*-oi-* (Hirt 1932)
- 5 The 2nd sg. imp. in general has suffered reduction to become attested as *-i* or *-ø*. However, the reflexive form, which is an extension of the original one, ensures us that it originally came from IE *\*-oi-* (Stang: 424). e.g.  
*imiēs* 'take'  
*sedziēs* 'sit'  
*guliēs* 'lie'
- 6 A further analogous piece of evidence might be cited:  
**ungandiR** (Nordhuglo stone, Norway 425 A. D., cf. Antonsen 1975, no. 31; Krause 1966, no. 65).  
According to Antonsen's new interpretation (Antonsen 1975: 47), as opposed to the common view, the form is *i*-stem gen. sg., rather than nom. sg. If this analysis were tenable, then we could (without following Antonsen's reconstruction *-iR*) interpret the ending as the reflex of the original *\*-ois*, thereby treating it in parallel with *vetterges* and *Alfer-* given earlier.

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*Faculty of Liberal Arts  
Chukyo University  
Yagoto Showa-ku,  
Nagoya, 466, Japan.*